

## Chapter 13

# Austria: A Rapidly Expanding Higher Education Sector

### 13.1 Education System

Between 2002 and 2011, the number of Austrians in tertiary education increased by 55 %. (Eurostat 2014)<sup>1</sup>

Austrian universities receive more students each year. This is in line with government policy to have a well-educated population, but it also leads to a high drop-out rate and discussion about the future of the university system. In the last decade, Austria's tertiary education participation has gone from well below the EU-27 average to well above this average (Eurostat 2014; BMUKK 2013a)<sup>2</sup>

One of the reactions to this development is the slow rise of honors programs in higher education in recent years. This is a logical step in the Austrian context, after the development of extensive programs and projects for talented and gifted children in primary and secondary education in earlier years.

Austria – like Germany – is a federal republic consisting of Bundesländer (Box 13.1), but educational matters are significantly more in federal hands than in Germany. While primary and secondary education programs are administered by the Bundesländer, tertiary education is the responsibility of the federal government. The education system is quite stable, as federal legislation on education can only be amended or introduced with a two-thirds majority in parliament (Box 13.2).

Differentiation is made early in the Austrian school system. Primary level is 4 years from age 6. Lower secondary school starts around age 10, also lasts 4 years, and is divided in four different levels. Academic secondary school lower level (*AHS Unterstufe*) is the one preparing students for university education. For students

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the highest figure of all countries in this study with the exception of Luxembourg (56.1 %). Figures are based on Eurostat 2014 and corrected for population growth.

<sup>2</sup> While 2.77 % of Austrians were in tertiary education in 2002 (below average), this had risen to 4.30 % in 2011 (above average) (Eurostat 2014). In student numbers the growth is also clear. While in 1955 there were fewer than 20,000 students in higher education, in 2012 this number had risen to almost 318,000 (BMUKK 2013a).

**Box 13.1: Austria – The Basics**

- 8.5 million inhabitants
- Capital: Vienna
- Federal republic, nine Bundesländer
- Social-democratic/christian-democratic-conservative coalition in power

**Box 13.2: Education in Austria**

- Nine years compulsory from age 6
- Four years primary education
- Four types of lower secondary school
- Universities and *Fachhochschulen* provide main types of higher education institutions
- Relatively open higher education admission, based on secondary school exam
- Small annual fee for university education
- Ministry of Education and Women's affairs responsible for primary, secondary and teacher education
- Ministry of Science, Research and Economy responsible for higher education

entering upper secondary school,<sup>3</sup> there are even more possibilities (see Fig. 13.1). However, students aiming for university generally remain at the same school, now at the upper level (*AHS Oberstufe*). This also lasts 4 years and ends with an exam. Students can be ready for university after completing 12 years of education and passing the exam, usually at the age of 18 (see Fig. 13.1). Weyringer (2013, pp. 370–372) provides a more detailed overview (in English) about the Austrian school system. A summary of the educational system flow from primary to tertiary education is also shown in BMUKK (2013b), and with some more comments in Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft (2011).

There are different ways to get an entrance ticket to Austrian universities. The most important is through *Matura*, the general high-school exit exam. In Austria, this is officially known as the *Reifeprüfung*.<sup>4</sup> The exams are not yet standardized nationally, but are taken per school and administered by the candidates' own teacher and an examination board that includes one external examiner. Standardization is foreseen for 2015.<sup>5</sup> Historically, Austrian students who passed the *Reifeprüfung*

<sup>3</sup>This includes the last year of compulsory education.

<sup>4</sup>It consists of a number of written and oral exams. Compulsory subjects are German and mathematics and one foreign language, usually English.

<sup>5</sup>Details of government plans on this matter can be found at <https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/ba/reifepruefungneu.html>

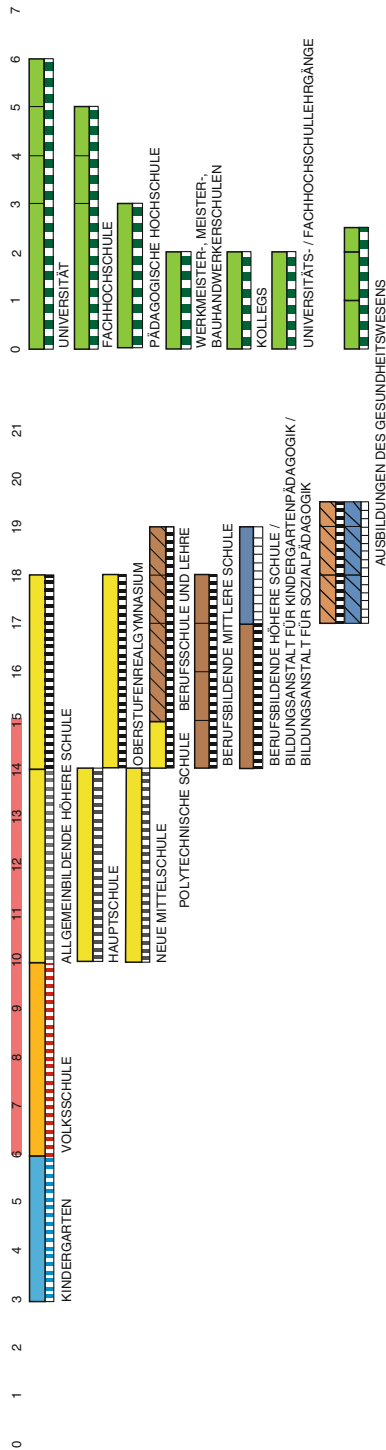


Fig. 13.1 Structure of the Austrian education system (Eurydice 2014) see Fig. 3.1b for standardized legend

were free to go to any university and study any subject they wanted. Partly because of the enormous increase in student numbers in recent years, in February 2013 a bill was passed in parliament, requiring extra entrance examinations for some studies. Included were popular studies such as medicine, dentistry, business administration, psychology, biology and communication science. University education in Austria was free until 2001, when a fee of around € 360 per semester was introduced. Current legislation requires only students who study longer than the formal minimum study period plus two tolerance semesters to pay the fee. Many exemptions to this rule are in place.<sup>6</sup>

Austria has six ‘classic’ universities, offering a broad spectrum of opportunities. The oldest and by far largest is the University of Vienna, which was founded in 1365, and has over 90,000 students. This is also the only Austrian university featuring prominently on world rankings.<sup>7</sup> There are also a number of specialized universities, which were in some cases ‘cut off’ the traditional universities.<sup>8</sup> All the main universities are state institutions. Since 1999 private universities are also allowed. They are usually specialized in areas such as design and theology and cater for less than 10 % of the student population (ÖPUK 2013).

Since the 1990s, Austria also has universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*), where teaching is focused more on the acquisition of professional skills (FHGuide 2013; BMWF 2013a).<sup>9</sup> In total, Austria has 73 higher education institutions. To find honors programs, we focus on 22 public universities. See Box 13.3 for more details.

### **Box 13.3: Austrian Higher Education Landscape**

- 22** Public universities (6 general, others specialized);
- 21** Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen*), offering professionally oriented bachelor, master and postgraduate programs;
- 13** Private universities;
- 17** University Colleges of Teacher education

<sup>6</sup>For example, in cases of illness, pregnancy, disability, child care and professional occupation fees are waived. For more information, see <https://www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/content/16/Seite.160104.html>

<sup>7</sup>The University of Vienna is found at place no. 170 of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2013–2014 and place 151–200 in the Shanghai ranking.

<sup>8</sup>These include technical universities in Vienna and Graz, medicinal universities in Vienna, Graz and Innsbruck, the University of Economics and Business in Vienna, University of Veterinary Science in Vienna, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna, University for Continuing Education in Krems and the Montanuniversität Leoben (for mining etc.). There is also a number of art universities, mostly in Vienna.

<sup>9</sup>At the time of writing there are 21 Fachhochschulen, most of which offer a wide range of subjects, but some offer just a restricted number of degree programs in specialized subjects.

## 13.2 Culture and Policy Towards Excellence

In Austria, the meaning and acceptance of giftedness and gifted education can be characterized as being ambivalent: On one hand, a great variety of supportive initiatives and endeavors can be listed, and on the other hand strong reservations toward the label highly gifted can be identified. (Weyringer 2013, p. 365)

According to University of Salzburg researcher Stephanie Weyringer, Austrians do not like to use the term ‘gifted’, because it separates an individual from the group. But while terminology use is difficult, provisions for talented children and young people have developed nonetheless. The first steps on the road to promoting excellence in Austrian education were set in the late 1980s.<sup>10</sup> Until that time, it was highly disputed. According to ÖZBF (Austrian Research and Support Center for the Gifted and Talented) researcher Claudia Resch, this rested on three reasons: one, the severely negative connotation of the term “elite” because of the Nazi past, two, the commonly held belief that gifted children and adults do not need any further support measures, and three, the differentiated school system (Resch 2014, pp. 11–12). While these reasons are still sometimes mentioned, ‘it became increasingly clear that special provisions for gifted children were a necessity’. Focusing on higher education, the first excellence program at an Austrian university started in 1989: the Center of Excellence at Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien.<sup>11</sup>

The national institution ÖZBF was formed in 1999. Subsequently, excellence in primary and secondary schools was well-established. In 2006, an extensive report on ‘excellence in research’ (FWF 2006) was ordered by the government and subsequently debated in parliament. A next step was the creation of the Task Force for Giftedness Research and Gifted Education, which consists of members from both ministries concerned with education and the ÖZBF.<sup>12</sup> At the request of the education minister, this Task Force has written the White Paper ‘Promoting Talent and Excellence’ (ÖZBF 2013a, published in English and German), providing an overview of talent/excellence programs at different levels of education in Austria. The White Paper calls for the promotion of talents and excellence in every educational institution, ranging from kindergartens, schools and universities, to adult education facilities, communities, and companies. It describes how the promotion of talents can be implemented in each of these areas of action. Furthermore the White Paper discusses the importance of research, the creation of support and research networks,

---

<sup>10</sup> In 1986, a local association for highly gifted children in the Salzburg area was founded. This later resulted in the formation of the Österreichische Zentrum für Begabtenförderung und Begabungsforschung (Austrian Research and Support Center for the Gifted and Talented; ÖZBF), which is still based in Salzburg.

<sup>11</sup> This highly successful program is described in more detail below. An overview of early initiatives throughout Austria at all levels can be found in Resch 2014.

<sup>12</sup> One of the other results was that in 2009, the new Institute of Science and Technology Austria (IST) was formed, with the ambition ‘to become a world-class research center. By 2026, up to 1,000 scientists and doctoral students will conduct research in an international state-of-the-art environment’ (IST 2013).

and the relevant training for teachers and counsellors. Also, wishes for policy development are formulated. Regarding tertiary education, three key aspects call for further attention: ‘More targeted actions to identify particular abilities are needed, as well as more specific programs to promote excellence. Furthermore, academic instruction should take into greater account the needs of talented and highly motivated university students’ (ÖZBF 2013a, p. 81). One of the wishes is fulfilled, as a professor in giftedness research and support at the University of Graz was appointed. Professor Roland Grabner started in autumn 2014 (Box 13.4).

#### **Box 13.4: Local Terminology**

The word ‘honors’ is rarely used in Austria. Instead, most policies and programs have the word excellence in them.

Local terms to refer to (programs for) talented and gifted students include:

- *Talenteprogramm* (talent program)
- *Exzellenz-Programm* (excellence program)
- *Begabtenförderung* (gifted education)
- High Potential Programm
- *Pluskurse* (‘plus course’)

For talented and gifted primary and secondary school-aged children, there is a wide range of programs available. In compulsory education, grade skipping has been possible since 1974 and special additional programs can formally run since legal changes in 1988 (Weyringer 2013, p. 374). In 2009, the ministry issued a ‘Decree for the Education of the Gifted’, firmly institutionalizing programs for this group. There is also a school specifically targeting gifted students: the Sir Karl Popper School in Vienna (ibid, pp. 376–377).<sup>13</sup> In addition, many initiatives are found outside the schools. National coordination rests in the hands of the ÖZBF. Countrywide programs include Olympiads in different subjects, summer academies and special children’s courses at universities (*KinderUnis*). Also, all of the states have their own programs for gifted secondary school students. For some this is relatively new, others have a longer experience.<sup>14</sup> At different universities in Austria, excellent high school students are able to follow classes for free. ÖZBF has a program in place to support this, called *Schüler/innen an die Hochschulen*.<sup>15</sup> After

<sup>13</sup> See also [www.popperschule.at](http://www.popperschule.at)

<sup>14</sup> An overview of the programs by Bundesland (in German only) can be found in ÖZBF 2013b. Some examples: In Niederösterreich, excellent students can apply for a place in a week-long intensive course at the castle of Drosendorf. In Kärnten, there is a summer school (talente camp) for gifted 10- to 14-year-old students, organized by Inizia, a local society for gifted children. In Salzburg, there are Pluskurse for students of different primary and secondary school ages.

<sup>15</sup> More information (German only) can be found on the ÖZBF website.

graduation from high school (*Matura*), students receive full credits for completed courses when enrolling at a university.

The attention for gifted and talented children in primary and secondary education has also found its way towards teacher training colleges. The Higher Education Act (2005) established talent promotion at these colleges (ÖZBF 2013a, p. 40). This is coordinated by the Federal Coordination Board for Gifted Education.<sup>16</sup> There are at least four programs to train teachers to become experts in gifted education (iPEGE 2010).<sup>17</sup>

While the Austrian government does not currently have a policy to support honors programs in tertiary education, it does stimulate excellence on an individual basis. At universities, applied sciences universities and teacher training colleges, gifted and high-achieving students are usually supported by allowances such as achievement-based scholarships or awards for masters or Ph.D. theses (ÖZBF 2013a, p. 87). This takes the form of grant programs (*Stipendienprogramme*) and prizes. Grants are handed out by different organizations on the basis of excellent study results and/or high motivation. These can be funded by the government, but also by private organizations.<sup>18</sup> The excellence grant (*Exzellenzstipendium*) is a new initiative from the federal government. Excellent students wishing to obtain a Ph.D. can apply for a one-time allowance of 9,000 euros (Galler 2013, p. 56) (Box 13.5).<sup>19</sup>

### Box 13.5: Key Players in Excellence

In the White Paper, the following institutions are considered ‘the pillars for developing talent and excellence in Austria’:

- the authorities concerned at both federal ministries
- the Austrian Research and Support Center for the Gifted and Talented (ÖZBF)
- the Task Force for Giftedness Research and Gifted Education
- federal coordination office for the promotion of giftedness and talent at teacher training colleges
- the provincial coordinators for gifted education

<sup>16</sup> Bundeskoordinationsstelle für Begabungs- und Begabtenförderung. It is located at the Teacher Education College in Vienna (Pädagogischen Hochschule Wien).

<sup>17</sup> These four programs are: Lehrgang ‘Expert in Gifted Education – Begabungen erkennen und fördern’ at the Kirchlichen Pädagogischen Hochschule in Wien/Krems; Akademielehrgang ‘Begabungs- und Begabtenförderung’ at the Pädagogischen Hochschule Oberösterreich in Linz; Lehrgang ‘Begabungsförderung und Potenzialentwicklung’ at the Pädagogischen Hochschule Steiermark in Graz; university Lehrgang ‘Gifted Education, MA’ at the Donau-Universität Krems.

<sup>18</sup> For example, the organization ProScientia supports 120 talented students (ÖZBF 2013a, p. 88). Local terminology used for these (financial) programs are: Leistungsstipendien, Förderungsstipendien, Exzellenzstipendien.

<sup>19</sup> This is in place since the study year 2012/2013.

### 13.3 New Developments

Publication of the White Paper has certainly put the subject of excellence higher on the political agenda. ÖZBF researcher Resch has made a SWOT-analysis of the current national strategy, and sees a number of opportunities (Resch 2014). One opportunity is formed by the new government program, published in December 2013. While the same coalition remained in power after the 2013 elections, the new government restructured the tasks of ministries. The former ministry of Education, Arts and Culture is now the 'ministry of Education and Women's Affairs' and the ministry for Science and Research has merged with the Economics ministry to the new ministry of Science, Research and Economy. One of the objectives in the government's work program is to 'Foster talent and gifted pupils – discover and support all gifted pupils and talents' (Austrian Federal Chancellery 2013, p. 44). This still needs to be worked out in concrete policy.

The Austria Science Board has been lobbying for more funding for excellent research, similar to the German Excellence Initiative (Nimmervoll 2013), and this has also found its way into the government program (Austrian Federal Chancellery 2013, p. 45) but, as of yet, not into explicit policy.

Overall, Resch (2014, p. 9) has an optimistic outlook: 'While until the 2000s, provision programmes predominantly focused on extracurricular activities for pupils, gifted education now follows a systemic and inclusive approach, including all (educational) institutions – kindergarten, school, college and university – as well as the family, the economy, the working world and the community'.

### 13.4 Honors Programs per University

In Austria, there is no standard program or procedure for talent and excellence promotion at the university level. 'Depending on their individual profiles and performance agreements, universities differ strongly with regard to the degree to which talent and excellence promotion is established' (ÖZBF 2013a, p. 90). There are no programs at the 22 universities that include the word 'honors' and projects fitting the definition of a honors program are still quite rare.

ÖZBF has recently been commissioned by the ministry to conduct a survey of excellence programs in higher education. A preliminary part of the resulting report, focusing only on the 22 public universities, was kindly provided to us by ÖZBF. The overview of excellence programs below draws from this overview, prepared by ÖZBF researcher Dr. Astrid Fritz (2014). She contacted universities with a similar question, which is why we have not contacted all universities ourselves, but just the ones with an identified program. More information on other higher education institutions was not yet available through ÖZBF.

Higher education institutions were asked for concrete measures to support talent on financial, structural and social level. The goal is to spread successful 'best practices' and to develop a comprehensive strategy for the promotion of talent and excellence in tertiary education in Austria. In addition to the programs below, some





**Map 13.1** Austrian universities with honors programs, 2014

measures for Ph.D. students and early-stage researchers employed at universities were also found.<sup>20</sup> The programs described below have some interesting aspects in common: they are all organized in year groups, run by the participants themselves, and have strong business involvement.

As in Germany, an important way to help talented students in Austria involves providing financial support. At different universities, prizes, grants and stipends are available. There are also nationwide or even international prizes. Showing the availability of these grants is also used to attract talented students. For example, the University of Klagenfurt tries to attract talented high school students in economics by offering them international opportunities. ‘We guarantee a well-financed study place for your semester abroad’.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, a non-university based network was also found, called Students4Excellence. In early 2014, this network merged with the German-based e-fellows network and is therefore discussed in the chapter about Germany.

On Map 13.1, the honors education offer at the 22 public Austrian universities is summarized. In Table 13.1, all universities are shown, ranked by size measured in student numbers.

### ***13.4.1 University of Graz and Technical University of Graz***

#### **13.4.1.1 Circle of Excellence Graz**

The Circle of Excellence Graz was founded in 2001 by three students who met by chance and concluded that although they were all top achievers with experience abroad, there was no network allowing them to meet each other. Their goal was to

<sup>20</sup> For example, the Medical University of Vienna runs several of these programs, including the MD Ph.D. program aimed at acceleration of talented Ph.D. students and the ‘Schrittweise’ program for talented young scientists.

<sup>21</sup> For more information, see <http://wiwi-studien.aau.at/index.php/starten/top-maturantinnen-gesucht>

**Table 13.1** Honors programs at universities in Austria<sup>a</sup>

University	Webpage	No. of students, 2012 <sup>b</sup>	Honors education offer <sup>c</sup>
University of Vienna	<a href="http://Univie.ac.at">Univie.ac.at</a>	92,426	
University of Graz	<a href="http://Kfunigraz.ac.at">Kfunigraz.ac.at</a>	29,127	Yes
Vienna University of Technology	<a href="http://tuwien.ac.at">tuwien.ac.at</a>	27,900	Yes
University of Innsbruck	<a href="http://Uibk.ac.at">Uibk.ac.at</a>	27,766	
Vienna University of Economics and Business	<a href="http://Wu.ac.at">Wu.ac.at</a>	23,555	Yes
University of Linz	<a href="http://Jku.at">Jku.at</a>	18,834	
University of Salzburg	<a href="http://uni-salzburg.at">uni-salzburg.at</a>	17,853	
Graz University of Technology	<a href="http://Tugraz.at">Tugraz.at</a>	12,679	Yes
University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna	<a href="http://boku.ac.at">boku.ac.at</a>	11,389	
Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt	<a href="http://uni-klu.ac.at">uni-klu.ac.at</a>	10,891	
Medical University of Vienna	<a href="http://meduniwien.ac.at">meduniwien.ac.at</a>	7,465	
Danube University for Continuing Education Krems	<a href="http://donau-uni.ac.at">donau-uni.ac.at</a>	6,894	
Medical University of Graz	<a href="http://meduni-graz.at">meduni-graz.at</a>	4,090	
Leoben University of Mining and Metallurgy	<a href="http://unileoben.ac.at">unileoben.ac.at</a>	3,338	
University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna	<a href="http://mdw.ac.at">mdw.ac.at</a>	3,242	
Medical University of Innsbruck	<a href="http://www.i-med.ac.at">www.i-med.ac.at</a>	2,781	
University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna	<a href="http://vetmeduni.ac.at">vetmeduni.ac.at</a>	2,285	
Kunst Uni Graz	<a href="http://kug.ac.at">kug.ac.at</a>	1,950	
University of Applied Arts Vienna	<a href="http://dieangewandte.at">dieangewandte.at</a>	1,710	
Mozarteum University Salzburg	<a href="http://uni-mozarteum.at">uni-mozarteum.at</a>	1,698	
Academy of Fine Arts Vienna	<a href="http://akbild.ac.at">akbild.ac.at</a>	1,434	
University of Art and Design Linz	<a href="http://ufg.ac.at">ufg.ac.at</a>	1,156	
<b>Total</b>		<b>299,355</b>	

<sup>a</sup>To compile this list, Fritz 2014 was used as a basis

<sup>b</sup>Source: BMWF (2013b, p. 31)

<sup>c</sup>In this table, we do not show the answer 'no' because not all HEIs were contacted by us, but we relied on data from other sources (Fritz 2014)

'improve the national and international competitiveness of the alumni of the five universities in Graz'. Other goals were to build a useful network and to avoid the anonymity of a big university. In their own words: 'The CoE is formed by outstanding students, companies and university professors. Every year, these three elements create a unique group, united by the values of the CoE' (Circle of Excellence 2009).

**Table 13.2** Circle of Excellence Graz

<i>Organizing institution</i>	Independent association, supported by University of Graz and Technical University of Graz
<i>Form</i>	Interdisciplinary program
<i>Target group</i>	Master students (or equivalent level)
<i>Admission</i>	Selection based on motivation letter and CV
<i>Description</i>	Each year a group of 20 students is formed which runs a year-long program of career training, seminars and group activities
<i>Founded</i>	2001
<i>Participants</i>	20 per year
<i>Website</i>	<a href="http://www.coe-graz.at">www.coe-graz.at</a>

The program is meant for students with career ambitions in trade and industry. A number of international companies are partners of the program, providing workshops for the participants and often offering job training or internships. After the selection process, a year-long program of seminars, training activities and team activities starts. After the first meeting, organization of activities is in the hands of the group itself, with university supervisors guiding the process. The Circle of Excellence is supported by the universities, but not part of the university. It is run by a board, which changes every year and consists of participants and alumni. Upon completion, participants receive a certificate issued by the program. They also remain members of the CoE and can be involved in, for example, the selection of new participants (Table 13.2).

### **13.4.2 Vienna University of Economics and Business (Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien)**

#### **13.4.2.1 General**

This university focuses strongly on the education of talents and has different programs to provide students with extra opportunities. The Centre of Excellence for master students has been running since 1989 and is the oldest program found in Austria. In 2004, the WU Top League was formed as a spin-off for bachelor students. Apart from these two interdisciplinary programs, there is also the mentoring@wu program, where talented students in later years of their program become mentors for starting students. To all students, the volunteering@wu program is available, where the students help children and young people in difficult situations to learn.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> More information about all programs for bachelor students (German only) is available at [www.wu.ac.at/students/bachelorstudents/excellence](http://www.wu.ac.at/students/bachelorstudents/excellence)

### 13.4.2.2 Specific Programs

The WU Top League for bachelor students was founded in 2004, as a spin-off to the Centre of Excellence (described below), but has become a full program in its own right. The program goal is ‘the motivation of participants to strive for top study achievements’. Students from the whole (specialized) university can enter in their first semester.<sup>23</sup> Competition is fierce, there are generally about 300 applicants for 80–100 places. The six-semester program is divided in two phases, each lasting three semesters. First, small groups are formed. The basis is a buddy system of tutoring and mentoring, where senior students help Phase I students. Throughout each semester, a number of events (excursions, lectures) are organized for the whole group, as well as coaching sessions and opportunities for short internships at partner organizations. In Phase II, focus is more on job training and sponsor meetings.

Moving to the master phase, the Center of Excellence (CoE) is Austria’s oldest, largest and best-known program for excellent students. Its goal is clearly described: ‘the development and support of a student elite’. The program is organized in year groups and involves a ‘triangle’ of participants: students, supporting university staff and businesses. Each year, all of the approximately 900 new master students at WU are invited to apply. Around 110 students will apply for 35–40 seats. After the selection process, the group starts with a kick-off weekend, where small groups are formed. Each of these groups works to organize two or three special events. This can be a seminar, an excursion, soft skills training, etcetera. In the following four semesters many activities take place. At the end of the fourth semester the group writes a final report, which is published on the website.

A special feature of both programs is the business involvement. Every year group has its own sponsor, a company or non-profit organization. The sponsorship involves a financial contribution, but also personal investment. Two or three company employees will join the group in their events. In both the WU Top League and the CoE, students who meet all the criteria receive a certificate after successful completion. More information is provided in the interview with coordinator Susanne Aigner in Box 13.6 (Tables 13.3 and 13.4).

#### **Box 13.6: ‘Guiding the Best of the Best’**

Interview with Susanne Aigner, program coordinator Top League/CoE at WU Wien

*What is the main motivation for students to join the program?*

‘Students see it as a big chance to meet new people, get new opportunities and challenge themselves. Also, participation definitely helps them in getting a job. Often the group sponsors will offer traineeships. That can be a nice start for a career.’

(continued)

<sup>23</sup> A later start is also possible: students with excellent results in their first three semesters receive an automatic invitation for phase II, others can also apply.

**Box 13.6** (Continued)

*What is the involvement of university faculty in the programs?*

‘Every group has academic supervisors: usually a professor and his or her assistant. They join the group and supervise the process. But we want the group to manage itself. We organize a kick-off weekend where we tell the students about the possibilities they have and divide them into smaller groups. From then on, we want to just guide them, we want the group to do the work.’

*Is your program well-known in Austria?*

‘Yes. Many Austrian companies have been involved as a sponsor and we have of course our alumni who have spread out throughout Austria and the world. The Center of Excellence in particular has a good name. This is because students come from our English-language master programs, for which the best Bachelor students are selected. And for the Center of Excellence, we select the best of those. So we can say we have “the best of the best”. Businesses like that.’

**Table 13.3** WU Top League

<i>Organizing institution</i>	Vienna University of Economics and Business
<i>Form</i>	Interdisciplinary program
<i>Target group</i>	Bachelor students
<i>Admission</i>	Selection based on high school exam grades, CV, motivation letter and essay
<i>Description</i>	Each year a group of 80–100 students is formed which runs activities over six semesters
<i>Founded</i>	2005
<i>Participants</i>	80–100 per year group (3 year groups active at same time)
<i>Website</i>	<a href="http://www.wu.ac.at/wutopleague">www.wu.ac.at/wutopleague</a>

**Table 13.4** WU Centre of Excellence

<i>Organizing institution</i>	Vienna University of Economics and Business
<i>Form</i>	Interdisciplinary program
<i>Target group</i>	Master students
<i>Admission</i>	Selection based on grades, CV and motivation letter
<i>Description</i>	Each year a group of 30–40 students is formed which runs activities over four semesters
<i>Founded</i>	1989
<i>Participants</i>	30–40 per year group (two year groups active at the same time)
<i>Website</i>	<a href="http://www.wu.ac.at/coe">www.wu.ac.at/coe</a>

**Table 13.5** Technical University of Vienna – TUthetop

<i>Organizing institution</i>	Technical University of Vienna
<i>Form</i>	Interdisciplinary program
<i>Target group</i>	All students
<i>Admission</i>	Selection based on grades, CV, motivation letter and assessment
<i>Description</i>	Each year a group of 60–70 students is formed which runs a year-long program of training, seminars and group activities
<i>Founded</i>	2007
<i>Participants</i>	60–70 per year
<i>Website</i>	tuthetop.at

### 13.4.3 Technical University of Vienna (TU Wien)

The excellence program TUthetop at the Technical University of Vienna is developed in close cooperation with partner companies. Its goal is the promotion of employability and the obtaining of key skills that go beyond the study of theoretical concepts. The best students (around 1,600 of the 27,000 in total at TU Wien) are invited to apply for this co-curricular program. The admission procedure is then based on an extensive application and an assessment. A year group of 60–70 students is formed, which runs a large number of activities during the year. The basic idea involves students designing their own program, in cooperation with partner companies and staff at the university. At the end of the year, the group produces a final report (published on the website) and students receive a certificate (Table 13.5).

The honors programs found at Austrian universities are all centered on year groups and all involve the private sector. Development is strongest at specialized universities. Will the same picture emerge when we look at neighboring Switzerland? We will find out in the next chapter.

**Open Access** This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License, which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.

## Literature<sup>24</sup>

Austrian Federal Chancellery. (2013). *Work programme of the Austrian Federal Government 2013–2018. Austria. A story of success*. Retrieved from: [www.bka.gv.at/DocView.axd?CobId=53588](http://www.bka.gv.at/DocView.axd?CobId=53588). 27 Apr 2014.

BMUKK (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur) [Austria]. (2013a). *Statistical Guide 2012 – Key facts and figures about schools and adult education in Austria*. Retrieved from: [www.bmukk.gv.at/mediapool/24417/statisticalguide\\_2012.pdf](http://www.bmukk.gv.at/mediapool/24417/statisticalguide_2012.pdf). 15 Nov 2013.

<sup>24</sup> **Note:** Literature used to prepare this book is included on this list. Some of the entries are in local languages and have not been read completely by the researchers. Instead, they have been searched with keywords to retrieve relevant information.

- BMUKK (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur). (2013b). *The Austrian education system*. Retrieved from: [www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/17684/bw2013\\_e\\_grafik.pdf](http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/17684/bw2013_e_grafik.pdf). 15 Nov 2013.
- BMWF (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung) [Austria]. (2013a). *Ausbau des Fachhochschulsektors*. Retrieved from: [www.bmwf.gv.at/startseite/hochschulen/fachhochschulen/](http://www.bmwf.gv.at/startseite/hochschulen/fachhochschulen/). 14 Nov 2013.
- BMWF (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung) [Austria]. (2013b). *Statistisches Taschenbuch 2013*. Retrieved from: <https://oravm13.noc-science.at/apex/f?p=103:36:0::NO::>. 6 Mar 2014.
- Circle of Excellence. (2009). *Folder 2009*. Retrieved from: [www.coe-graz.at/www/downloads/CoE%20Folder%202009%20E%20web.pdf](http://www.coe-graz.at/www/downloads/CoE%20Folder%202009%20E%20web.pdf). 25 Nov 2013.
- Eurostat. (2014). *Statistics database*. Available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>. Used January 2014.
- Eurydice. (2014). *Eurypedia – European Encyclopedia on national education systems*. Retrieved from: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php>. Data for different countries gathered November 2013 – May 2014. Last checked 22 May 2014.
- FHGuide. (2013). *Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences at a Glance*. Retrieved from: [www.fachhochschulen.ac.at/](http://www.fachhochschulen.ac.at/). 15 Nov 2013.
- Fritz, A. (2014). *Bericht zum Status Quo der Begabungs- und Exzellenzförderung an österreichischen Hochschulen*. Preliminary version of ÖZBF report provided by author by e-mail.
- FWF. (2006). *Exzellenzinitiative Wissenschaft. Ein Konzeptpapier des FWF im Auftrag des bm.bwk*. Retrieved from [www.fwf.ac.at/de/downloads/pdf/exzellenzinitiative-wissenschaft.pdf](http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/downloads/pdf/exzellenzinitiative-wissenschaft.pdf). 14 Nov 2013.
- Galler, E. (2013). Universitäre Exzellenzförderung im Blickpunkt. Eine Übersicht für Österreich. *News & Science – Begabtenförderung und Begabungsforschung*, 35(3), 56. Retrieved from: [www.oezbf.net/cms/tl\\_files/Publikationen/news\\_science/news\\_ausgaben/n+s%2035%20web%20opt.pdf](http://www.oezbf.net/cms/tl_files/Publikationen/news_science/news_ausgaben/n+s%2035%20web%20opt.pdf). 19 Nov 2013.
- Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft. (2011). *The Austrian education system*. Retrieved from: [www.bic.at/downloads/en/brftipps/0\\_1\\_bildungssystem\\_en.pdf](http://www.bic.at/downloads/en/brftipps/0_1_bildungssystem_en.pdf). 12 Nov 2013.
- iPEGE (International Panel of Experts for Gifted Education). (2010). *Professionelle begabtenförderung. Eine Dokumentation von Lehr- und Studiengängen*. Salzburg: iPEGE. Retrieved from: [www.oezbf.net/cms/tl\\_files/Publikationen/Veroeffentlichungen/iPEGE\\_2\\_web\\_optimiert.pdf](http://www.oezbf.net/cms/tl_files/Publikationen/Veroeffentlichungen/iPEGE_2_web_optimiert.pdf). 19 Nov 2013.
- IST (Institute of Science and Technology Austria). (2013). *About IST Austria*. Retrieved from: <http://ist.ac.at/about-ist-austria/>. 14 Nov 2013.
- Nimmervoll, L. (2013, November 1). *Wissenschaftsrat fordert Exzellenz-Milliarde für Österreichs Unis*. *Der Standard*. Retrieved from: [derstandard.at/1381370621777/Wissenschaftsrat-fordert-Exzellenz-Milliarde-fuer-Oesterreichs-Unis](http://derstandard.at/1381370621777/Wissenschaftsrat-fordert-Exzellenz-Milliarde-fuer-Oesterreichs-Unis). 14 Nov 2013.
- ÖPUK (Österreichische Privatuniversitäten Konferenz). (2013). *Universitäten im Überblick*. Retrieved from: [www.privatuniversitaeten.at/university](http://www.privatuniversitaeten.at/university). 15 Nov 2013.
- ÖZBF (Österreichische Zentrum für Begabtenförderung und Begabungsforschung, ed.). (2013a). *White Paper 'Promoting Talent and Excellence'. On Behalf of the 'Task Force for Giftedness Research and Gifted Education'*. Salzburg: ÖZBF. Retrieved from: [www.oezbf.net/cms/tl\\_files/Publikationen/Veroeffentlichungen/weissbuch\\_E\\_fertig\\_interaktiv.pdf](http://www.oezbf.net/cms/tl_files/Publikationen/Veroeffentlichungen/weissbuch_E_fertig_interaktiv.pdf). 19 Nov 2013.
- ÖZBF (Österreichische Zentrum für Begabtenförderung und Begabungsforschung). (2013b). *Bundeslandkoordinationsstellen für Begabungs- und Begabtenförderung*. Retrieved from: [www.oezbf.net/cms/index.php/bundeslandkoordinationsstellen.html](http://www.oezbf.net/cms/index.php/bundeslandkoordinationsstellen.html). 16 Nov 2013.
- Resch, C. (2014). National policies and strategies for the support of the gifted and talented in Austria. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 4(3), 9–30.
- Weyringer, S. (2013). Gifted education in Austria. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 36(3), 365–383.